

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7380

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

USMISSION BERLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BONN 13182

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, GW

SUBJECT: AN INTERIM ASSESSMENT OF THE STEINER AFFAIR

1. SUMMARY: THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE STEINER AFFAIR WILL PROBABLY BE VAGUE PUBLIC DISTASTE WITH POLITICIANS IN GENERAL WITH THE GREATEST DISCREDIT GOING TO THE SPD. END SUMMARY.

2. UNLESS UNEXPECTED EVIDENCE COMES TO LIGHT OR WHOEVER IS LYING ADMITS IT, THE PROBABILITY IS GOOD THAT THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE STEINER AFFAIR WILL END PRETTY MUCH WHERE IT BEGAN, IN ACCUSATIONS, PLEAS OF INNOCENCE, AND MUTALLY-CONTRADICTIONARY TESTIMONY. BUT IF THAT PROVES TO BE THE CASE AND NO-ONE IS PROSECUTED OR EVEN FORMALLY CENSURED, IT WILL STILL NOT FOLLOW THAT THE MATTER WILL
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PROVE MERELY TO HAVE BEEN A PASSING INTEREST AND WITH-

OUT CONSEQUENCE.

3. ONE LIKELY CONSEQUENCE IS A REDUCTION IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC RESPECT FOR THE BUNDESTAG AND BY CONTAGION A REDUCTION IN THE RESPECT FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN GENERAL. ANOTHER CONSEQUENCE IS THE POLITICAL DAMAGE DONE SPECIFICALLY TO EHMKE AND WIENAND. EVEN GREATER DAMAGE WOULD HAVE BEEN DONE TO STEINER EXCEPT THAT HE WAS NEVER MORE THAN A POLITICAL DWARF, WHEREAS WIENAND CONTINUES TO BE AN SPD WHIP AS WELL AS A MEMBER OF THE BUNDESTAG AND EHMKE IS A MINISTER IN BRANDT'S CABINET.

4. THE MOST SERIOUS CONSEQUENCE BELONGS FOR SEVERAL REASONS, TO THE SPD. THE FIRST REASON IS THE GENERAL ASSUMPTION THAT THE TESTIMONY OF STEINER RINGS SOMEHOW TRUE NO MATTER HOW DESPICABLE STEINER HIMSELF MAY BE. THIS IS TRUE IN PART BECAUSE WIENAND DOES NOT CUT AN ATTRACTIVE FIGURE, IS STILL UNDER SUSPICION OF SELLING HIS INFLUENCE IN THE PANINTERNATIONAL AFFAIR OF LAST YEAR, AND HAS BEEN DAMAGED IN A GENERAL WAY BY THE TESTIMONY OF BAEUCHLE, A FORMER SPD BUNDESTAG COLLEAGUE. FURTHERMORE THERE IS THE CURIOUS COINCIDENCE THAT EHMKE, FOR REASONS HE DID NOT GO INTO IN DETAIL, WITHDREW 50,000 DM FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S PRIVATE FUND--THE PRECISE AMOUNT BY WHICH STEINER'S BANK ACCOUNT GREW SHORTLY THERE AFTER.

5. THE CONSEQUENCE TO THE SPD IS ALSO SERIOUS BECAUSE IT IS THE MOST IDEOLOGICAL OF ALL MAJOR GERMAN POLITICAL PARTIES AND THUS ITS VOWS OF CHASTITY ARE TAKEN MORE EARNESTLY. (THIS IMAGE WAS STRENGTHENED DURING THE SPD'S MANY YEARS IN OPPOSITION IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THE PRAGMATIC FACT THAT CORRUPTING THE OUTS IS NOT A COMMON PRACTICE). IT IS TRUE THAT THE SPD'S GREATEST ASSET, THE CHANCELLOR HIMSELF, HAS YET TO BE DRAGGED PERSONALLY INTO THE MATTER, BUT THE WHOLE AFFAIR, PARTICULARLY THE PROTECTION OF WIENAND A YEAR AGO, STRENGTHENS THE CRITICISM, EVEN WITHIN THE SPD, THAT HE IS WEAK AS A PARTY LEADER. THE DANGER TO THE SPD IS THAT IT WILL LOSE SOME OF THE SWING VOTE IT PICKED UP IN

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BOTH 1969 AND 1972. HILLENBRAND

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